



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Fifth Sunday of Easter A



Paradiselubok. Heaven. Nineteenth century Russian



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

PRAYER OF SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO Trust in God's Heavenly Promise

My God, let me know and love you,
so that I may find my happiness in you.
Since I cannot fully achieve this on earth,
help me to improve daily
until I may do so to the full.
Enable me to know you ever more on earth,
so that I may know you perfectly in heaven.
Enable me to love you ever more on earth,
so that I may love you perfectly in heaven.
In that way my joy may be great on earth,
and perfect with you in heaven.

O God of truth,
grant me the happiness of heaven
so that my joy may be full in accord with your promise.
In the meantime let my mind dwell on that happiness,
my tongue speak of it,
my heart pine for it,
my mouth pronounce it,
my soul hunger for it,
my flesh thirst for it,
and my entire being desire it
until I enter through death
in the joy of my Lord forever.

Amen.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy is a clarion call to love one another and to pattern our lives according to the example of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ The liturgy invites us to be agents of God's love in the world.
- ▶ The sacraments of the Church remember and make present to us the life, mission, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. *Remembering that makes that which is remembered present* is called anamnesis.
- ▶ When we worship and remember sacred events we bring those events into the present so that we too are given access to the saving power of Christ today.
- ▶ During this Easter season we continue to remember and make present the Easter redemption offered to us by Christ through his saving death and resurrection. It takes seven weeks to celebrate, proclaim, and remember the entire paschal event of Easter.
- ▶ The liturgy invites parish communities to take stock and discern whether or not they are living as the Mystical Body of Christ.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Acts 6:1-7

- ▶ First century Palestine was a melting pot of cultural diversity.
- ▶ Greek speaking people converted to Judaism.
- ▶ Palestine became highly influenced by Greek culture. In other words the area was becoming Hellenized. Tension existed between the various cultural groups.
- ▶ Greeks were influenced by Greek philosophy and the Jews were influenced by the multitude of strains within Judaism.
- ▶ As the church grew, it became obvious that it would have to adapt to the burgeoning cultural influences.
- ▶ Christianity was no longer an off-shoot of Judaism alone. Gentile converts were also initiated into the community.
- ▶ The community was confronted with the challenge of meeting the needs of a diverse group of people—Jewish, Hebrew speaking people, Jewish Greek speaking people and Greek speaking Gentiles.
- ▶ Greeks were not only added to the numbers of Christians, they were also converting to Judaism.
- ▶ Adapting to the changing circumstances posed problems for every community.

- ▶ Language, for example was a primary issue. Greeks gathered in synagogues to hear the Scriptures in Greek. An Aramean proclamation of the Targum took place in other synagogues.
- ▶ The influx of immigrants was met with mistrust.
- ▶ Separate services in separate synagogues helped the situation.
- ▶ Christianity, seeing itself as a unified body in Christ, attempted to bring all the groups together—not, however, without a great deal of tension.
- ▶ For example, the Greek speaking Christians felt that their widows received less than the Jewish speaking Christians received in the daily distribution of goods.
- ▶ The apostles agreed with the accusation and decided that something must be done to rectify and correct the situation. They were charged with preaching the Gospel and were thus unable to devote the necessary attention to the problem.
- ▶ The apostles insisted that the Greeks appoint seven of their own men to serve at table and thus insure that everyone's needs were met.
- ▶ The seven men who were already in charge of alms for the poor were appointed to the task. The apostles commissioned them for this role by laying hands on each of the seven.
- ▶ As their numbers grew with each passing day the community was called upon to creatively resolve its issues.
- ▶ Empowered by God's Spirit, a new missionary fervor was forged in the life of God's newly formed people.
- ▶ Today's pericope provides the first evidence of a formal structure within the church—a service oriented structure in which the ancient investiture rite of laying on of hands was used to commission people for various roles within the community.
- ▶ Unity in the community was of paramount importance. Unity was maintained by being attentive to and addressing the tensions that arose within the community.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What are the implications for your life in this reading?
- ▶ Compare the immigrant relations of the early church with the immigrant situation today. What can we learn from our ancestors in faith?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about the importance of community? Why do we need community?

- ▶ What is the fundamental lesson for our lives as people of God in today's reading from Acts?

Second Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9

- ▶ Today's reading was probably a homily given at an ancient baptismal rite.
- ▶ The letter/homily connected the ancient story of Exodus with Christianity; it explained baptism as participation in Christ's death and resurrection and it reflected upon what it meant for the community to live the paschal mystery of Christ.
- ▶ The community was understood as God's dwelling place—God's temple, comprised of living stones.
- ▶ The people of God were likened to a royal priesthood, akin to the ancient concept of people in covenant relationship with God.
- ▶ Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of this temple and the people are the living stones. The temple/church/community/people of God is built upon Christ who is the foundation.
- ▶ Access to the holy rock of Sinai in the Old Testament was forbidden under penalty of death.
- ▶ Access to God through the intimate embrace of Christ is evidence of a new relationship between God and his people—it is a stark contrast. Christ provides intimate access to God.
- ▶ The new people of God are gathered in and through Christ.
- ▶ The Church functions like a priest in that it offers a spiritual sacrifice made holy and acceptable in the eyes of God through the sacrifice of Jesus.
- ▶ The elite class of priesthood in Israel and the grain and cereal offerings were rendered obsolete as a result of Christ's once and for all sacrifice.
- ▶ Israel's sacrifice was no longer acceptable to God; it was replaced by the pleasing spiritual sacrifice made possible through his Son's death and resurrection.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ In what way is this reading a comforting or consoling word?
- ▶ What is the primary theme of this reading and what does it have to do with our everyday lives?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that you now have access to God through the sacrifice of Jesus?
- ▶ What are the implications of this reading?

- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that you are a living stone—a royal priesthood? What does that mean to you?
- ▶ What is the author's image of Church? How does it compare with your own?

Gospel: John 14:1-12

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
 - ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
-
- ▶ Today's Gospel is Jesus' farewell address to his disciples. His farewell address is akin to the similar addresses made by the great prophets such as Jacob and Moses who went before him.
 - ▶ Jesus reminds his disciples that he is about to leave them but that they will one day join him. In the interim Jesus will prepare a place for them.
 - ▶ The "place" is not a "place" as we understand "place". It is a state of being—a complete and total union and communion with God.
 - ▶ Thomas doubted Jesus' words. Jesus in turn reminds the gathered troupe that he was the way, the truth and the life.
 - ▶ Jesus is the way—he is the only way to know complete union with God. If they know Jesus they can be assured they know the Father. Jesus is so intimately one with the Father that the unity between them is total and complete.
 - ▶ Jesus is the truth—he shows us who the Father is. We can only know God through his Son. Jesus is the revelation of the *Truth* who is God.
 - ▶ Jesus is the life—because God is the creator of life and Jesus and God are one.
 - ▶ Jesus leaves his disciples a legacy. He reminds them of the unfailing, unconditional love his Father bestows on them.
 - ▶ Disciples fall into their real lives only when they enter intimate communion with God. They enter that communion by loving as Christ loved them.
 - ▶ We become who we were created to be by offering ourselves for the sake of others as Christ offered his life for us.
 - ▶ The more we come to know God, the more we will grow in *love* as *love* and *God* they are inseparable realities.
 - ▶ John's community suffered persecution at the hands of their Jewish counterparts. The synagogue was the center of their lives, yet they were

expelled from it by their Jewish friends and neighbors. Where would they go to meet God now?

- ▶ Jesus was their answer. To know Christ is to know God. One need go no further than to encounter the Christ who lives within the self and the people of God.
- ▶ Philip is such a prototype of human frailty and ignorance. He walked with the Lord. He walked by Jesus' side as he ministered to the multitudes. Yet still he asked Jesus to show him the Father. "Where had he been? Is he really that ignorant?" How he must have broken Jesus' heart! Does he really not get it? How could he not see that Jesus and his Father shared an intimate union and *to see Jesus* meant that a person already encountered the Father?
- ▶ Jesus is the revelation of God; some have referred to him as the sacrament of God. A sacrament is an outward sign offered to give grace. Grace is God's own self-revelation. Who could be more of a sacrament than Christ himself?
- ▶ All one needs to do to encounter God is to encounter Jesus, his life, his ministry, his works and his paschal sacrifice.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See the appendix for an example.

- ▶ What spoke to you the most in today's Gospel?
- ▶ What are the implications of today's Gospel?
- ▶ We become who we were created to be by offering ourselves for the sake of others as Christ offered his life for us. What does that mean to you?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced union with God? What does it mean to you to have experienced communion with God? Describe your experience of communion with God.
- ▶ What does it mean to you that Jesus is the revelation of God and that Jesus is the sacrament of God?
- ▶ What are the implications of Jesus' farewell address for the community he left behind?
- ▶ Has there ever been a time in your life when you missed a truth that was right under your nose all the time? What does the fact that Philip missed who Jesus was have to do with us? What are the implications?

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

We become who we were created to be by offering ourselves for the sake of others just as Jesus offered his life for us. Many years ago my youngest son was in a car accident. His life was spared but his best friend died. It is a common question at such a time of sorrow to ask God why one was spared and the other was snatched away at such a young age. There is never an answer to that question.

I do, however, look at my child today. Is he deserving of the life that was given back to him? Did he give that life due honor? Has he become the person he was created to be? Indeed he has. I have never known a young man with as much love in his heart as my son. He bends over backwards to help anyone he can help. He has very little guile in his heart and he treats everyone he meets with great respect and dignity.

His life's work is honorable; it is the work of Jesus and his father Joseph. He is a carpenter and loves the satisfaction of using his hands and his craft to create something beautiful and functional.

He followed the love of his life to Ireland and intends to forge a life with her. Yet in the prime of his life, when his future lies before him, complete with plans for a successful business, without giving a second thought, he offered to give me his kidney so I could live. He could have simply remained silent and offered nothing knowing I could get in line with others and wait for a kidney from a deceased person. Knowing that my chances of survival are much better coming from a family member, he wasted no time making the decision and getting tested. He put his life on hold and is offering the sacrifice of himself so his mother can have the best chance for a new life. He is not only my child, he is my hero. When I tell him that I worry about his decision he reminds me that we are all called to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others. If we cannot do that for our own family how do we think we will ever be able to do it for one another? He told me that it is his responsibility and his honor. He indeed has become and is becoming the person he was created to be. He is an example of self-sacrificing love for his mother.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Ecumenism
Holy Orders
Revelation I or II
Sacraments
Evangelization
Catholic Social Teaching
Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and
Purgatory

Baptism
Confirmation
Symbols of Bread and Wine
Church and Ecclesiology
Church Structure
Jesus Christ
Incarnation
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

ECUMENISM

There was tension in the first Christian communities between the Hellenized Christians and the Jewish Christians. Unity was difficult to attain. Peter addresses the issue in the community insisting that the needs of the Greek-speaking people be met. He appointed seven ministers to care for their needs. His extension of hospitality, love and compassion are examples that underpin a solid theology of ecumenism—that is, our approach to other faith traditions. It is thus fitting that today we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about ECUMENISM.

HOLY ORDERS

The investiture of the deacons in the second reading is another example of the way in which the early Christian community addressed leadership in the emerging Christian church. The sacrament of Holy Orders evolved through the centuries as the community's need for the ongoing leadership of Christ through the ministerial priesthood. It is thus fitting that we address what the church teaches about the sacrament of Holy Orders.

REVELATION I or II

Jesus prepares his disciples for his absence through his farewell discourses. He reveals his identity as the "Way the Truth and the Life. He is the revelation of God—he is the ultimate sacrament of God. Scriptures reveal Christ to us and Christ

reveals and is God. It is thus a most appropriate time to focus our attention on REVELATION I or II.

SACRAMENTS

Sacraments continue Christ's saving mission in our day and our time. We are given access to his ministry through the sacraments. The Church teaches that the sacraments of the Church manifest Christ's own Paschal Mystery—his passion, death and resurrection. We remember what Christ did and in the process the Paschal Mystery is made present to us. We are given access to his healing, reconciling and salvific mission through the sacraments. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about sacraments—the celebrations/rituals that bring the healing, reconciling, saving mission of Christ into our midst—that make present Christ's life, passion, death, resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit. Thus today our doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about SACRAMENTS.

EVANGELIZATION

The author of Luke and Acts relate the story of the development of the emerging Christian Church. The Easter season tells the story of the Church. The sacraments of initiation require that we live our baptismal role as priest to serve God's people, prophet to proclaim God's word through our words and actions and king to lead people to Christ. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on our Easter faith and what Jesus commanded us to do--go out and preach the Good News to all the nations. Today's doctrinal session will focus on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The seven Greek-speaking designees were appointed to meet the needs of the widows, orphans and those who found themselves outside the mainstream culture. Whether Jew or Greek all have an equal place in the kingdom of God. Such is the theology that underpins the social Gospel of the Church. It is thus most appropriate that we address CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

ESCHATOLOGY, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY

Jesus tells his disciples that in his Father's house there are many dwelling places. He reminds believers of the eternal life that awaits them. His eschatological farewell address provides a fitting opportunity to focus our doctrinal session on ESCHATOLOGY, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

BAPTISM

At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgies of the Easter season make the sacraments of initiation an important focus for our doctrinal session. Thus it is fitting that our doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM.

SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgies of the Easter season make the sacraments of initiation an important focus for our doctrinal session. The sacrament of confirmation anoints the person with God's Spirit and conforms their life intimately to Christ's life—thus strengthening them to fully participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ that was manifested par excellence at the Easter Vigil. Through this sacrament we are given the strength to profess faith in Christ. During the weeks of Easter we have a front row seat watching the early Church go out and spread the Christian faith when we hear the Acts of the Apostles proclaimed each week. Thus today it is fitting that we focus our attention on the SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

Every Eucharistic liturgy re-presents the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary and his resurrection from the dead. At the Easter Vigil the elect were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. The liturgies of the Easter season are an invitation to focus our attention on the sacraments of initiation. The sacrament of Eucharist fully incorporates the neophyte into the Eucharistic community. When we eat the Bread of Life and drink his Blood we share fully in his Paschal Mystery. The sacraments of initiation incorporate the neophyte into the Paschal Mystery of Christ—his life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Spirit that was manifested par excellence in the Easter Vigil liturgy. Thus today it is fitting that we focus our attention on the sacramental SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE.

CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Throughout the Easter season, Luke, the author of Acts and the Gospel of Luke charts the development of the emerging church—the fledgling communities. The church exists to establish the reign of God now as Christians await the coming of Christ in the age to come. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

Throughout the Easter season, Luke, the author of Acts and the Gospel of Luke charts the development of the emerging church—the fledgling communities. The church exists to establish the reign of God now as Christians await the coming of Christ in the age to come. The church was unified in heart and purpose. They shared all things in common. They upheld the ideal Church as they worked to achieve that end. Ministry was needed in the community and a clear definition of roles. Those roles continue today. It is thus appropriate to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CHURCH STRUCTURE.

JESUS CHRIST

Today's Gospel relates Jesus' farewell address to his disciples. He reveals his identity. He is the Truth, the Way and the Life. It is thus most fitting that during this Easter season we focus our attention on Jesus Christ and what we believe about him. Today is an appropriate time to focus our attention on JESUS CHRIST.

INCARNATION

Jesus' farewell address is a catechism on his identity. He is the long-awaited Messiah—he is the Son of God, the Word made Flesh. The heart of salvation history culminates with the INCARNATION of Jesus Christ. It is thus most appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the INCARNATION of Christ.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.